

FINDINGS FROM A 2001 SURVEY OF MASSACHUSETTS PHYSICIANS

The Massachusetts Division of Health Care Finance and Policy worked with the Massachusetts Medical Society to develop a survey of practicing physicians to measure the amount and type of free, discounted and self-paid care provided to patients in their offices. The survey was mailed to 8000 primary care and specialist physicians in June 2001. Primary-care physicians were over-sampled. The state hoped to learn more about the type of ambulatory care uninsured and under-insured people seek out as well as care they may pay for out-of-pocket even while insured.

Almost 11% (n=874) of surveys were returned as of September, when the survey concluded. Physicians, as opposed to office staff, filled out most (89%) surveys.

The following five medical specialties accounted for 67% of respondents and 69% of all physicians in the sample.

Specialty	Percent of Respondents	Percent of Total Physicians in Sample
Internal Medicine:	23%	33%
Pediatrics:	16%	13%
Psychiatry:	9%	9%
Obstetrics-gynecology:	10%	7%
Family Medicine:	8%	7%

Six of the top ten zip codes for respondents were also among the top ten for those in the sample. They are located in Boston, Cambridge and Worcester.

*** The data which follows was collected through survey responses and reflects the information provided by those who responded, therefore it is not necessarily representative of Massachusetts physicians as a whole.***

Practice type

- 72% of the respondents indicated that they were providing data for themselves
- 28% provided data for a group practice

The most common types of practices:

- Community-based private: 25%
- Single specialty: 21%
- Academic/teaching: 19%
- Solo: 17%

Practice size

- Median number of physicians in a practice is 2
- Three-quarters work in practices of six or fewer
- 90% belong to groups of 20 or fewer physicians

Insurance Coverage

Mean estimates of the type of insurance coverage by patients served*:

*Note: This data was calculated using only those responses adding to 100%.

- Managed Care: 41%
- Medicare: 23%
- MassHealth: 17%
- Indemnity: 9%
- Other: 7%
- Workers' Compensation: 2%

Uninsured Patients

- Eighty-one percent of the practices accept new patients regardless of their ability to pay.

Types of practices and their acceptance of new patients regardless of ability to pay:

Community Health Center:	100%
Academic/teaching practice:	92%
Group-practice:	89%
Solo-practice:	70%

- Ninety-five percent of practices currently have patients who do not have health insurance. An estimated 8% (mean) of their patients are uninsured.
- Ninety-four percent of the practices reduce or waive fees for patients who are uninsured and have financial hardship. However, 73% have no formal mechanism for determining a patient's financial hardship.
- Eighty percent of practices inform patients about the availability of public assistance programs. Forty-two percent reported assisting patients with determining MassHealth eligibility and/or completing a MassHealth application.
- The services most frequently provided to uninsured patients on a free or discounted basis last year were well visits (59%) and sick visits (17%).

Self-Pay Patients

- Practices estimate that three-quarters of self-pay patients have no health insurance. The remaining self-pay patients are either insured but are not covered for the services provided (16%), do not want services to be reported to their insurance carriers (4%), or have other reasons for paying out-of-pocket (5%).
- The services most frequently provided to self-pay patients last year were well visits (63%) and sick visits